



Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 38
Issue 4 *March/April 1998*

Article 6

4-1-1998

Children's Literature: What's on the Horizons

Lauren Freedman

Western Michigan University, lauren.freedman@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Freedman, L. (1998). Children's Literature: What's on the Horizons. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 38 (4). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol38/iss4/6

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.





Children's literature: What's on the horizons

Lauren Freedman

Western Michigan University

Chapter Books

Creech, Sharon. 1997. *Chasing Redbird*. NY: Scholastic. ISBN: 0-590-55899-4. 261 pp.

Chasing Redbird is told by thirteen-year-old Zinny Taylor. A fast-paced story, it is filled with intriguing characters like Aunt Jessie who is called "Redbird" by Uncle Nate, Jake Boone who takes undo risks on Zinny's behalf, and Zinny's older sisters who are self absorbed and think Zinny is "... the strangest and stingiest dirt daubing doodlebug." Once again Sharon Creech has created a cast of characters that eludes easy description. As the story begins, Zinny has found a map detailing the Bybanks — Chocton Trail which begins on the hillside above Zinny's family's property. Zinny is determined to uncover and clear all twenty miles of it. Her fierce independence and her desire to figure things out keep the reader immersed in her story and sorry when it is over.

Fleischman, Sid. 1996. *The Abracadabra Kid: A Writer's Life*. NY: Beech Tree. \$4.95 pb. ISBN: 0-688-15855-2. 208 pp.

In this highly readable and entertaining autobiography, Sid Fleischman narrates his life story. He begins with his childhood desire to be a magician. The story is told in forty-three two to six page chapters each illustrated with a photograph depicting the time he is describing. Each chapter also begins with a headnote which contains a comment or a question from a reader. While he does not answer these directly, they offer a frame for the information in the chapter. For example, Chapter 16 "Expert at the Card Table" about his mother's days of playing poker begins with the following headnote: "Your book would make a movie or a soap opera. Do you think you could use our class? Let's do lunch." Chapter 24, "Life Among the Floating Mines" begins with the reader's question, "My uncle was in the war. Did you know him?" In this chapter he talks about his experiences aboard ship during WWII.

Griffith, Helen V. 1998. *Dinosaur Habitat*. Illustrated by Sonja Lamut. NY: Greenwillow. \$15.00 hb. ISBN: 0-688-15324-0. 112 pp.

Suspenseful, interesting and humorous, *Dinosaur Habitat* offers young readers an accurate look at the world of dinosaurs through the direct experience of twelve-year-old Nathan and his brother, eight-year-old Ryan as they are magically transported into the world of Ryan's terrarium. The story begins with Nathan's frustration at having to baby-sit his younger brother now that his mother has a new job. However, it is Ryan who, through his knowledge of the dinosaur world enables his brother and himself to skillfully negotiate their adventure.

Hurwitz, Johanna. 1998. *Faraway Summer*. Illustrated by Mary Azarian. NY: Morrow Junior Books. \$15.00 hb. ISBN: 0-688-15334-8. 112 pp.

In this work of historical fiction, Hurwitz relates the story of Dossi Rabinowitz who, through the Fresh Air Fund program (began in 1877 and still in existence), is able to leave her crowded tenement in New York City and spend a week in the rural town of Jericho with a Christian family named Meade. The year is 1910 and Dossi, a young Jewish girl, is at first uncertain about her good fortune. Her host sister Emma is also unsure about the wisdom of the program. The story is told by Dossi through letters home, a diary she keeps, and direct narration. *Faraway Summer* depicts the very human side of diversity and shows the strength of true friendship.

Stevenson, James, 1998. *Popcorn*. Illustrated by James Stevenson. NY: Greenwillow. \$15.00 hb. ISBN: 0-688-15261-9. 64 pp.

In this collection of 32 poems, Stevenson uses both words and illustrations to bring to life in the reader's mind's eye and heart a variety of everyday things. "Popcorn" is stored in huge brown boxes. "The Mack Truck and the Shovel" are "neighbors in the weeds" who reminisce about "the old days." "At Last" the dogs in the back seat get "to drive." This delightful volume of poems makes the ordinary new and stirs the imagination.

Picture Books

Cole, Henry, 1998. *I Took a Walk*. NY: Greenwillow. \$15.00 ISBN: 0-688-15115-9. 20 pp.

Through both illustration and text, *I Took a Walk* depicts a variety of environments and the plants and animals which inhabit each one. Each environment is shown in a five-page spread including a

fold-out page. The environments are related to one another as the reader first enters the woods, walks through a meadow, follows a stream, and finally comes to the banks of a pond. On the last page of the book all four areas are shown with each of the plants and animals labeled and listed.

Coleman, Evelyn. 1998. *To be a Drum*. Illustrated by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. \$16.95 hb. ISBN: 0-8075-8006-6. 32 pp.

In this beautifully illustrated book of mixed media rag paintings by Brenda Lynn Robinson, Evelyn Coleman tells the story of the enslavement of Africans whose descendants are now African Americans like Daddy Wes, Mat and Martha. In Africa, "The earth's heart beat out the rhythm of all there is. We listened — and sounded the rhythms back for her. With the drums we spoke to the animals and to the people."

Narrated by Daddy Wes, who tells the story to his children Mat and Martha, the story emphasizes the strength and magnificence of this spiritual connection with the earth and how even with their drums taken and destroyed, the people could make, " ... our feet drums, ... our mouths drums, ... our speech drums, ... our hands drums." And, how while fighting for their freedom, they made "... our minds drums, ... our communities drums, ... our art drums." It ends with Mat and Martha listening to the earth's rhythm confirming that they, too, are free and can "Become a drum."

Harber, Frances. *The Brothers' Promise*. Illustrated by Thor Wickstrom. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-8075-0900-0. 32 pp.

This book is a retelling of a story in the Talmud about the promise two brothers make to their dying father to share everything equally and to watch over one another. It takes place in Eastern Europe around the turn of the century. Though the brothers are very different, they keep their promise, and each thinks of the other and shares what little they have during a severe drought. As witness to this goodness, the heavens open with tears of joy. The oil on board paintings add depth and richness to this warm and happy tale.

Russo, Marisabina. 1998. *When Mama Gets Home*. NY: Greenwillow. \$15.00 hb. ISBN: 0-688-14985-5. 32 pp.

This is a family story told through the eyes of the youngest of three children whose mother works outside the home. The story begins just before Mama gets home as the children are beginning the preparations for dinner and ends with the narrator's bedtime. The gouache paintings add a great deal to the story as the illustrations tell

us that the story is set in an apartment in a busy city. A simple yet realistic story, *When Mama Gets Home* will warm the hearts of all children (and adults) who read it.

Ryder, Joanne. 1997. *Winter White*. Illustrated by Carol Lacey. NY: Morrow Junior Books. \$16.00 hb. ISBN: 0-688-12992-7. 32 pp.

In this arctic tale of friendship and tradeoffs, fox and lemming trade the sun and mosquitoes for darkness and snow. They make this trade with a large bear who calls himself Winter. The stranger turns fox and lemming white so the other animals will know who to thank for the darkness and the snow. Due to the others' displeasure, fox and lemming again seek out Winter to make a new trade. They find that Winter is willing because the constant sun has made it hard for him to sleep. Known for her wildlife paintings, Carol Lacey's illustrations add both realism and charm to this tale of trickery and problem solving.